

Jefferson Street Bridge

Spanning the East Branch of Wears Creek

Jefferson City

Cole County

Missouri

HAER No. MO-31

HAER

MO,

26-JEFCI,

16-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
National Park Service
U. S. Department of the Interior
P. O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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Jefferson Street Bridge

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Location: Spanning the East Branch of Wears Creek on Jefferson Street, immediately south of the Rex Whitton Expressway (U. S. Highways 50 & 63)

UTM: Easting - 15/571/840
Northing - 15/4269/620
Quad: Jefferson City

Date of Construction: 1857; modified in 1964 and 1980

Builder: Dr. William Armstrong Davison

Present Owner: City of Jefferson
City Hall
320 E. McCarty Street
Jefferson City, Missouri 65101

Present Use: Vehicular and pedestrian bridge, to be replaced by a new vehicular and pedestrian bridge

Significance: The Jefferson Street Bridge is a single span, stone masonry arch bridge. It is the only bridge of its type remaining in the city of Jefferson and one of only six such bridges known to exist in the State of Missouri. The Jefferson Street Bridge is older than any of the other remaining stone masonry arch bridges in Missouri, and is also the longest.

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August 1987

I. HISTORY

The Jefferson Street Bridge was constructed in 1857 for the city of Jefferson by Dr. W. A. Davison of the city. Enabling legislation was passed at the June 16, 1855, meeting of the city's Board of Aldermen, with the appropriation of \$800 "For the Proper grading of Jefferson Street beginning at or on High Street and running in a southern direction and also for the purpose of erecting and the building or erection of a good bridge across the creek on same street."¹ The alderman did not take further action on the bridge until June 1, 1857, when they passed the following resolution: "Resolved that the committee on streets & alleys be authorized to contract with Dr. Davidson (Davison) for the erection of a bridge across the creek on Jefferson Street and that they be allowed to contract for the payment of the sum of \$50 by the City of Jefferson, therefor; provided said Davidson (Davison) will bind himself to put a substantial bridge at the above named point and insure its safety for four years" ²

Over the course of the next several months, Davison built the bridge and, on December 7, 1857, the Board of Alderman authorized the payment of \$231.25 to him for completion of the bridge.³

The bridge was a crucially important structure on the most important north-south artery into the city. Indeed, Jefferson Street was, and is, the dividing line between the eastern and western parts of the city and throughout the late nineteenth century, as one petitioner to the Board of Alderman noted, it "was one of the principal thoroughfares for farmers entering the city."⁴

II. THE BRIDGE

This structure is a single span, stone masonry arch bridge, with a span of 33 feet. The bridge deck is approximately 60 feet long. Its rusticated stone elliptical arch, faced with rectangular rather than wedge-shaped stones, and vault, formed of irregular but finished stone blocks, fits with national mid-nineteenth century bridge construction, as well as Missouri's German masonry traditions of the same period. The bridge's spandrels and string-course appear to be laid in random ashlar pattern, with at least partially finished stone. Whether the bridge is solid stone or rubble filled is not known. Twentieth century alterations roughly doubled the bridge's deck by means of steel and concrete wing additions on either side of the original deck. The western wing was added in 1964; the eastern wing in 1980. Although alterations impinge on the bridge's architectural integrity, the arch of the bridge, when viewed from the east or west, conveys a distinctly nineteenth century appearance.

Survey work done by the Missouri State Highway Department and the Missouri Department of Natural Resources reveal that this is the oldest and longest bridge of its type remaining in the State of Missouri.⁵

III. BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

While it is not known who the actual architect or engineer of the bridge was and who the workmen were, the contractor for building the bridge was Dr. William Armstrong Davison, Sr. Dr. Davison was born in Winchester, Virginia, on August 20, 1810. A physician trained at the University of Pennsylvania, Dr. Davison came to Jefferson City in 1840. Active in civic, religious, and political affairs, he was a southern sympathizer and marched with General Sterling Price's during the Civil War. Dr. Davison was also an avid land speculator and developer in the Jefferson City area. He died on January 6, 1877, at his residence in Jefferson City, Missouri.⁶

V. FOOTNOTES

- 1 Board of Aldermen Minutes, Book 1, June 16, 1855, p. 376.
- 2 Ibid., June 1, 1857, p. 449.
- 3 Ibid., December 7, 1857, p. 467.
- 4 Board of Aldermen Minutes, Book 4, July 11, 1881, p. 59.
- 5 This writer reviewed copies of bridge survey reports compiled by the Missouri State Highway Department and the State Department of Natural Resources in the archives of the latter agency. A summary of the significance of the Jefferson Street Bridge is contained in a "Statement of the Opinion of the State Historic Preservation Officer concerning the Eligibility of a Property for Inclusion in the National Register," dated February 24, 1986, and signed by Dr. Frederick A. Brunner, State Historic Preservation Officer for Missouri (copy attached).
- 6 Joseph Summers, Jr., "History of the Cole County Medical Society," unpublished manuscript in possession of author, unpaginated. Jefferson Inquirer, June 27, 1857, 2-1.